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SUBJECT: DASD WHELAN MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER MELES

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Classified By: Charge Deborah Malac for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: DASD Theresa Whelan and Ambassador Yamamoto met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles on October 15 to discuss security issues of mutual interest. The primary topic was the situation in Somalia. The PM laid out two scenarios -- one that had the Somali TFG "getting its act together" and one that saw the TFG collapse -- and said he thought it would become apparent fairly soon which scenario would occur. Ethiopia believes there are rifts in the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia that can be exploited. Meles said that the GOE has no concerns over weapons on the pirated M/V Faina going to the SPLA. He also reported that the GOE has decided that it will no longer sit quietly in the face of allegations of human rights abuses committed by the ENDF. From now on, the GOE will investigate and respond with facts so that those who are so inclined will learn the truth. Ambassador Yamamoto's sidebar conversation with the Prime Minister is reported septel. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During her brief visit to Ethiopia October 14-15, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) Theresa Whelan met with Prime Minister (PM) Meles Zenawi to discuss mutual security issues, including Somalia, the M/V Faina, and allegations of human rights abuses by the ENDF. Ambassador Yamamoto, DCM Deborah Malac (note taker), DATT Colonel Bradley Anderson, Shoshanna Matney, OSD Policy East Africa Director and Michelle Judson, Joint Staff, J-5 Assistant Deputy Director for Africa, accompanied DASD Whelan to the meeting.

Somalia

¶3. (C) After thanking the PM for the ongoing partnership, DASD Whelan asked for his frank assessment of the situation in Somalia. Meles outlined two possible scenarios, one decidedly more positive than the other. The first scenario, which the PM noted was at best 30-40 percent likely, was that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) would "get its act together;" establish a credible administration, capitalize on the progress made in the Djibouti accord and start to rebuild institutions in Somalia. Under those circumstances, said Meles, Ethiopian troops would remain long enough to ensure the re-hatting of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) by the UN and the turnover of Mogadishu to that new force, and Ethiopia would be more proactive in counter-terrorism operations.

14. (C) The alternative scenario, which Meles admitted was far more likely, was that the TFG would continue to fight among itself, fail to make any progress on implementation of the Djibouti accord and, ultimately, collapse. Under these circumstances, said the PM, Ethiopia would withdraw to positions along the border, look to see if it was possible to stabilize other parts of Somalia and, most importantly, "keep its options open" regarding future interventions. Meles stated unequivocally that if al Shabaab took over Mogadishu, then Ethiopia would intervene to stop it. Meles noted that he thought they would know which of these scenarios would transpire relatively soon.

15. (C) Meles pointed the finger at TFG President Yusuf as the one responsible for the fall of Kismayo in August, and noted that it was Yusuf's culpability in this event that soured the Ethiopians on Yusuf. Meles said Yusuf either encouraged the intra-Darood factional fighting for his own personal reasons or he failed to move quickly enough to stem the in-fighting, thus leaving an opening for the Shabaab and more radical elements to exploit. Meles went on to say that there are cracks within the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) and the former Islamic Courts (CIC) movement that are ripe for widening. According to him, many of the clan supporters of the ARS/Asmara no longer believe that the group represents the best interests of Somalia and they are ready for a real, peaceful solution to conflict. This is why progress in building administrative institutions in Mogadishu is critical, said the PM, but the TFG just is not responding quickly enough. As a result, the second scenario, of TFG collapse is far more likely to occur which will necessitate a new "post-TFG" peace process, which would include elements of the ARS and those in Mogadishu "with significant constituencies".

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16. (C) As to what happens to Somaliland and Puntland if the TFG collapses, Meles indicated that a TFG collapse would have little impact on Somaliland's stability. That stability would be determined by internal factors within Somaliland itself. Puntland, however, was another matter as Meles pointed to the uneasy relationship between the Puntland administration and Yusuf. If Yusuf were to return to Puntland it could exacerbate tensions and allow an opening for extremist elements to exploit. In such a case, said the PM, "we would have to do something" to prevent it. DASD Whelan asked if Ethiopia saw any connection between the TFG and the pirates operating off-shore Somalia. Meles said the problem was largely in Puntland and resulting from the fact that the Puntland administration did not control all of its own territory and some of the government might be benefitting.

Weakening the Shabaab

17. (C) In response to a question from DASD Whelan on how best to weaken the Shabaab, Meles was quick and precise in his response - convince the clans that if they "ride that horse" they will lose all opportunity to participate in any present or future government in Somalia. Unfortunately, he added, not all clans share that desire for a role in governance. Some clans and individuals are only interested in their own parochial interests; Meles expressed particular concern about clans in the Bay and Bakool regions. With sustained effort, said Meles, it is possible to reduce Shabaab to a "proper size" of just isolated individuals pursuing personal agendas.

M/V Faina

18. (C) Meles told DASD Whelan that Ethiopia had not known that the weapons on board the pirated ship M/V Faina were bound for the SPLA until press reports had appeared. He said they had their suspicions, but no confirmation until this

became public information. Meles added that they had absolutely no concerns about the fact that Kenya had helped the SPLA. Admitting that Ethiopia continues to train and provide equipment to the SPLA, Meles noted that Ethiopia was unable to procure weaponry for the SPLA and therefore knew the SPLA was looking for alternatives. Further, he continued, we know the "day of reckoning" is coming in Sudan. If an implosion is avoided, the weapons will be harmless as they will be integrated into a united Sudanese defense force. If the implosion is not avoided, said Meles, these weapons can be used to protect the southern Sudanese from atrocities.

Human Rights

¶9. (C) In closing, DASD Whelan indicated that she continued to face questions from the Congress about our security cooperation with Ethiopia in light of allegations by Human Rights Watch and others of human rights abuses by Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). She asked how we might work together to provide factual information to counteract these inquiries. The PM responded forcefully that the ENDF had inherited the traditions of the EPRP which include not raising a finger against unarmed civilians, a tradition that he remembered from his fighting days and held sacred. He went on to say that they have investigated many of the allegations leveled against them but have been unable to substantiate them in most cases. According to Meles, the government has now decided that rather than remaining quiet in the face of these allegations of human rights abuses, it must begin to respond with factual information. In this manner, he said, those who are truly interested in learning the truth will be able to do so. A response to the Human Rights Watch report would soon be forthcoming.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Yamamoto's side-bar conversation with Meles on the upcoming IGAD summit will be reported septel.

¶11. (C) DASD Whelan did not have the opportunity to clear this message prior to departure.
MALAC